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I put the pyrocanthus in a blue vase
and spread the coneflower over my kitchen table.
I had to make sure they could bear the noise
and catch the benefits of my small radio
as if they were more than flowers—glass frogs at least,
or metal quail, their ears amazed, their small heads
nodding with the music. As far as the changes
in government, as far as *that* noise, the frog
presides over that, he is a kind of congressman
anyhow with his huge mouth open to catch
the flies and beetles; he has turned green from money
sticking to his skin. As far as the coneflower,
as far as the rays, they were already gone
and only the wood was left, only the naked
beautiful heads. As far as my love was concerned
I picked them before the snow came, before the ice
filled up the cavities and the cold leaves
turned thin and curled themselves around the stem.
As far as the pyrocanthus, as far as the vase,
as far as the metal quail, their eyes turned up,
their tiny beaks in the air, I turned the knob
from music to religion and let it rest
on wisdom, two or three voices, an English, a German,
discussing rape in Asia, discussing starvation, the
quail nodded, even the pyrocanthus nodded,
and I, a little furious, I turned to Canada
to see what the French were doing. That day I ate
soba, with parsley; I ate standing up; I fed
the quail: I fed the plants, though they were dead,
I listened to the forecast, I shaved in the dark,
making sure I got both cheeks and the hair
above the bullet. Afterwards I opened
a 1970 *New York Times*, something

about the new mayor, something about a murder
behind a bush, something about a dump
on fire, either a bomb or a match, a heartless
speech by a Georgia senator, a horoscope,
a kidnapping, a stock decline. I sang
first to the cloves but I whispered to the garlic
and ate two pounds of grapes. The frog lay down,
as far as I know, with the pyrocanthus, it was
something like bestiality, the coneflower
wrapped itself around the vase and I
lay down on the sofa; but first I put my glasses
in my right shoe and dropped my keys in the delicate
acorn bowl, then turned my leg so the wallet
wouldn't cut my buttocks. As I recall I thought of
the quail before I went to sleep, one of them
is tall and straight, he is the watchdog, the other
bends down to eat. I have to lie just so
with my head like that and my feet like that, it is
a little small for a bed, although my sleep,
of all my happy sleeps, is happiest there
on that white silk. I had a word with the frog
and one with the pyrocanthus, I had to school them
considering the date; all the holidays
were happening at once and it would be
disaster if they didn't get ready. "America
may not have room for you," I said. We giggled
and turned the lights out; even a little light
can ruin your sleep, no matter how much Mozart
flows over you, no matter how much Fats Waller.
Darkness is what we love. "Darkness, darkness,"
they sang; the frog was a tenor—what a shock!—
the pyrocanthus was a pipe, the coneflower
a wheeze or two. I was an alto—after
all those years a measly alto with only
a little range: "Oh put us all to sleep,
it's 1994, put us to sleep,
darkness, darkness!" a little tin shout from the lower
two registers, a little broken glass from the upper.